The Book of Ruth

Chantable English version with tropes by Len Fellman
June 24, 2019
based on the translations of Robert Alter, Stone Edition Tanach, JPS, Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible, New King James Bible
using the cantillation system by Portnoy and Wolff in 'The Art of Cantillation'

Chapter 1

1:1 [And it came to pass] in the day when there ruled the judges, there was a famine in the land. And there went a man
[from the town] of Bethlehem [in the land of Judah] to sojourn in the plains of Moab: he and his wife, and his two sons.
2 The name of the man [was Elimelech], [and the name] of his wife was Naomi. The name [of his two sons] |
were Mahlon and Chilion, [who were Ephrathites] from Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the plains of Moab, [and they stayed there].
3 Then died Elimelech, husband of Naomi. There remained just herself and her two sons.
4 [And they took] [for themselves] wives—[Moabite women]. The name [of one wife] was Orpah, and the name of the other one was Ruth.
They dwelt in that place for some ten years.
5 Then died also the two of them: Mahlon and Chilion. There remained the woman: she survived her two children, [as well as her husband].
6 She arose—both herself [and her daughters-in-law]—[they turned back] from the plains of Moab,
because she had heard in the plains of Moab, [that pleased had been] YHWH [to visit His people] and to provide for them bread.
7 [And so she went off] [from the place] at which [she had been staying], and took her two daughters-in-law [with her].
[She set out] on the road [to return] to the land of Judah.
8 [And spoke] Naomi to [her two daughters-in-law], "[Go now]—[go back home]: [each of you] to the house of your mother.
[May you be sustained]: [May YHWH] [treat you] with kindness, [just as you yourself] [have truly taken care] of the dead [as well as of me].
9 [May there be granted] by YHWH [to the two of you], that you find security (*m'nucha*), [each one] in the house of her husband."
[She then] [kissed them]. They lifted up their voice and they wept.
10 [And they said] [this to her], "Rather, with you we will go back [to your people]."
11 And said Naomi, "Go back, my daughters. Why should *you* go with me?
[Are there still in me] sons [in my womb] that could be for you as husbands?

1:12 [Go back], my daughters: [go your way], since too old am I to have a husband.
Even if I thought, "I have hope." [Even if] [there were for me] tonight a husband, even if I bore sons,
13 [even in that case] | [could you really wait] until they [had grown up]? [Would you thus] [deprive yourselves], and not be [with a man]?
No, [not this, my daughters]. [Bitter it is] for me [more than for you]—since there has come out against me [the hand of YHWH].
14 [They lifted up] their voice and wept [yet again]. [A kiss of farewell] [Orpah gave] [to her mother-in-law]. But Ruth cleaved unto her.
15 [And Naomi said to her], "[You see?] Gone back [is your sister-in-law] [to her people]—[and to her gods].
[So *you* go back]—follow your sister-in-law."
16 [And replied] Ruth, "[Do not entreat me] [to forsake you]—[to turn back] [from following you]. [For this is what I intend]:
Wherever you will go, [there I will also go]. Wherever [you stay], [there I will stay]. [*Your* people] [is *my* people], [and your God] [is my God].
17 Wherever you die—[that's where I will die], and there, [I will be buried]. [Howsoever may God treat me]:
[May there be done] [what YHWH] [wills to me], and even more harshly, if anything but death [should cause parting] between me and you.
18 [When Naomi realized] how determined she was to go with her, she stopped speaking about it to her.
19 [So they went off]—[the two of them], [until they came] to Bethlehem. [And it came to pass],
[when they arrived] there [in Bethlehem], astir [was the whole town] [because of them]. [Women asked], "Can this be Naomi?"
20 Naomi [said to them], "Do not call me Naomi (which means *"pleasant"*).
[Call me] rather Mara (which means *"bitter"*), [since embittered] [I am by El Shaddai]. [I am bitter] exceedingly.
21 For I was full [when I went out], but I was empty [when I was brought back] by YHWH.
[Why indeed] [should you call] me Naomi, when YHWH [has borne witness] [against me]. [El Shaddai] brought misfortune upon me."
22 [So she returned]—[Naomi went home], and Ruth the Moabite, [her daughter-in-law], [came with her]. She returned from the plains of Moab.
[And the two of them] came to Bethlehem [end of chapter melody] [right at the beginning] of the harvest of barley.

Chapter 2

2:1 [And to Naomi] [there was a kinsman] [through her husband], a man great in stature, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz.
2 [And one day she spoke]—Ruth the Moabite woman—[speaking these words to Naomi], "[Let me go, pray], to the field, [and let me glean]
[among the ears of grain], [behind the one] of whom I may find favor [in his eyes]." And Naomi said to her, "[Go then], my daughter."
3 [She set out], and she went to glean in the field, [walking behind] the harvesters.
She happened by chance [upon a part] of the field [belonging to Boaz], the man from the family of Elimelech.
4 [And—there was Boaz!] [having come] from Bethlehem. He said to the harvesters, "YHWH [be with you]."
And they answered him, "May you be blessed by YHWH."
5 [Then there spoke] Boaz, [asking his servant-lad], who was stationed [over the harvesters], "To whom does this young woman belong?"
6 [And he answered him]—[the servant-lad] who was stationed over the reapers—[saying this],
"[A young woman] of the Moabites [she is], who came back with Naomi from the plains of Moab.
7 [She came and she said this], '[Let me glean, pray] and gather [from among the sheaves], [walking behind] the harvesters.'
[She came here], [and has been on her feet] (*ta`amod*) since the morning [and until now],
[This is how she worked]. She rested in the shelter [but a short time]."
8 [Then Boaz spoke]: Boaz said this to Ruth, "[Will you not] listen [to me, my daughter]?
[Do not go] to glean in another field. [I say to you indeed], do not move on [from this place]. Stay here and abide fast [by my maidens].
9 [You should fix your eyes] [on the field] [where they reap], and follow [after them]. For [have I not charged] my lads
[that they should not] [touch you]? [If you should have thirst], [you should go] [to the water jugs], [and you may take a drink]
from what was drawn from the well [by the lads]."
10 [She then fell] [on her face] [and bowed down] [to the ground],
and [she said to him], "[How can it be] [that I have found] favor [in your eyes], [that you take note of me], when I am a foreigner?"
11 [And replied] Boaz, saying [this to her], "It was told—all of it was told: [a report was made to me] of all [you have done]
[for your mother-in-law] after the death of your husband, [and how you left] your father [and your mother] and the land [of your nativity],
and [that you have come] [unto a people] [whom you did not know] in former times.

2:12 May you be repaid by YHWH [for your deeds]. Indeed may your reward [truly be complete],
[coming from] YHWH the God of Israel, [to whom you have come] to take refuge under His wings."
13 [And to these words Ruth replied], "[May I find favor] [in your eyes], my lord, [because indeed] [you comfort me],
and because you have spoken to the heart of your handmaid, [even though I] could [scarcely be] like one [of your slavegirls]."
14 [And he spoke to her]: these words to her were spoken by Boaz at the time [that they ate a meal],
"[Come over] here and eat [of the bread], and dip your piece of it in vinegar."
[So she sat down] beside the harvesters. [He passed to her] [some roasted grain]. She ate and was satisfied, [and left some over].
15 [Then she got up] [to glean again]. [He gave a command]: Boaz charged his young men, [saying this to them],
"[She may even] [go in among] [the sheaves of grain themselves] to glean, and do not reproach her."
16 [And besides this], you must pull out for her [grain from the sheaves]. Leave it for her to glean. Rebuke her not for it.
17 So she gleaned in the field until evening, [and she beat out] that [which she had gleaned], [and it came to] about an ephah of barley.
18 [She picked it up] and came [to the town], and showed her mother-in-law what [she had gleaned].
[Ruth took out] [and gave to her] that which was left [after eating her fill].
19 [And Naomi spoke]—Ruth was asked by her mother-in-law, "[Where were you?] [Where did you glean] today? [Just where] [*did* you work]?
May the one who took notice [of you be blessed]." [Ruth told] [her mother-in-law] [all about] how [she had worked with him].
[And she said this], "The name of the man—[the one of whom]—[I in fact worked] [with this man] today is Boaz."
20 To this there said Naomi [to her daughter-in-law], "Blessed [may he be] by YHWH,
[who has not] failed in His kindness with the living [as well as the dead]." [And she spoke further] [to her]: [Naomi said this],
"Related [to us] [is this man]. One of our redeeming kin he is."
21 [Then said] Ruth, [the Moabite woman], "And furthermore | he [said this to me]: '[To the lads] [that are mine], [you shall stay close],
until [they have finished] all of the harvest—[all that is mine]."
22 Then said Naomi to Ruth [her daughter-in-law], "It is good, [truly, my daughter],
for you [to go out] with [his own girls], so no one should harrass you in the field of another."
23 [And so she stayed close] to the girls of Boaz, [and she gleaned] till the end of the harvest of barley and of the harvest of wheat.
[end of chapter melody] [and she continued to live] [at home with her mother-in-law].

Chapter 3

3:1 Then there spoke to Ruth, Naomi [her mother-in-law]:

"[O my daughter!] [Shall I not indeed] [seek to find for you] [a settled place] (*manoach*) that it be well with you.

2 [So now I offer this]: [Is not] Boaz our kinsman, and were you not [with his girls]?

[And I know that he] [will be winnowing], on the threshing floor, the barley tonight.

3 [Therefore wash yourself] | [and rub on perfumed oil], [and then put on] [your finest clothes].

[Put them on you], [and go down] [to the threshing floor]. [Don't make yourself known] [to the man] till he has finished eating and drinking.

4 [It shall be] [when he has lain down], [you will notice]—[you will know the place] where [he is lying down].

[And you will go in] and uncover his feet: [then *you* lie down]. And he [will then tell you] that which you must do."

5 And Ruth [replied to her], "[All of these things] that you are asking, [I will do].

6 [So she went down] [to the threshing floor], [and she did all these things]—all that was bidden [by her mother-in-law].

7 [And he ate]—Boaz [ate and drank], and his heart was merry. [And then Boaz went] [to lie down] [beside the stack] of barley.

[Then she came in] quietly. She uncovered his feet, [and lay down].

8 [Now it happened] in the middle [of the night]:

He was startled—and the man [turned himself around].

And behold! [There was a woman], lying [there at his feet].

9 He said, "[Just who are you?]" [And she answered him], "[It is I]: Ruth [your handmaid]. [Do spread] your wing* over your handmaid, since a kinsman-redeemer are you."

**kanaf*: a wing, or a corner of a garment

10 [And Boaz said to her], "[Blessed one!] [You are blessed] by YHWH, my daughter. [Better loyalty] is in your latest devotion (*chesed*) [than there was at the first], [in that you did not go] after other men—[either poor men] [or rich ones].

11 [So listen to me now]. My daughter, have no fear. Whatever you ask of me, [I will do for you].

Indeed it is known [by all those in the gate] of my people [the truth regarding you], that a woman of virtue (*eshet chayil*) you are.

12 But now, although [it is true] that "redeeming kin" [I am for you], [there is someone else]—a redeeming kinsman, closer than I am.

13 [For now you should stay here] | [stay with me tonight]. But then in the morning, [if he should redeem you], it is good: [let him redeem].

[But if he will not]—[he does not wish to act] [as redeemer for you], I will redeem you myself, [as YHWH lives]. [Lie here] [until morning].

3:14 [And she lay] at his feet until morning. [At daybreak she got up] [before a person] could recognize his fellow.
[For he said], "[Let it not be known] that there had been a woman [on the threshing floor]."
15 [And Boaz said to her], "[Bring now the shawl to me]. [Bring me the garment]—[the one that you have on],
[and hold it out]." [So she held it out]. [He measured out] [six shares of barley] and laid it [on her]. [Then she went] into the city.
16 She came [to her mother-in-law], who asked, "[How is it *with* you], my daughter?"
[And she told her] [what Boaz had done]—all that *had* been done *for* her [by this man].
17 [And Ruth said this to her], "Six shares of barley I have here. [I give it] to you.
Because he said to me, 'Do not go empty-handed [to your mother-in-law].' "
18 She answered, "Stay, my daughter, until [you should know] [just how] [will fall out] the matter. For [he will not] rest—the man—
[end of chapter melody] until this is settled—the matter concluded, [and settled today].

Chapter 4

4:1 [Now Boaz] [had gone] [up to the gate], and [he sat down there]. [And there he saw] [the redeeming kin] pass by—
the man [spoken of by Boaz]. [He said to the man], "Come over and sit here; come [here, my friend]." [He came over] [and sat down].
2 [Then he also took] [all of ten] [men who were there]—elders of the city, and said, "[Sit down here]". [And they sat down].
3 He said [to the near kinsman], "The parcel of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech
[is being sold] by Naomi, [who has come back] from the plains of Moab.
4 And I said to myself, [I need to disclose this] [in your ears] [by saying this to you],
"[You can buy it now] in the presence [of all those who are seated here] and in the presence of the elders [of my people].
[If you would redeem], redeem. But if you do not plan to redeem, [you must] [tell this to me], [that I may know],
since [there is none] but you [to redeem] [except for me], [who come after you]." [The man answered], "I will redeem it."
5 Then [said Boaz], "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, [then also you must acquire]* *reading *'et* for *me'et*
Ruth the Moabite, [wife of the deceased]. [You will acquire her] to raise up the name of the dead, [on his estate]."
6 And replied [the redeeming kinsman], "[Then I] cannot [redeem it for myself], [lest I jeopardize] [my own estate].
Redeem—[you yourself]—[my right of redemption], since I cannot redeem it."

4:7 [And thus it was] in former times in Israel [concerning redemption] [and transfer of property], to [confirm anything]:
[one took off his shoe]—[a party in the transaction]—[he took the shoe] [and gave it] [to his fellow]. Thus was the attestation in Israel.
8 [So when he said]—[the kinsman-redeemer]—to Boaz, "[Buy it for yourself]," [he took off] his shoe.
9 [Then Boaz spoke]: Boaz spoke to the elders [and to all of the people], [saying "Witnesses] you are [this day], [that I have] acquired
[all that belonged] to Elimelech, [and I have bought as well] all that was Chilion's and Machlon's [from the hand] of Naomi
10 Moreover [also Ruth] [the Moabite woman], who was the wife of Mahlon,
[I have acquired] for myself [as a wife], [to restore] [the name of the dead] on his inheritance,
[so as not to cut off] [the name of the dead] [from his brothers], [and from the gate] [of his place]. Witnesses you are, this day.
11 And they all responded—[all of the people] [that were in the gate], and the elders, "[We are witnesses]."
[And may God grant]—may YHWH grant to the woman who is coming [into Your house] [to be like Rachel] [and like Leah],
[the ones who] [did build]—[the two of them]—the house of Israel. [May you grow mighty] in Ephrath, [and be renowned] in Bethlehem.
12 [May it be] [that your house] [is like the house] of Perez, who was born to Tamar [unto Judah],
[through the seed] [which will] [be given] by YHWH [unto you] by [this young woman].
13 [So he took her]—Boaz married Ruth: [she became his] [as a wife], [and he came] [to bed with her].
[There was granted] by YHWH [to her to be with child]: she conceived and bore a son.
14 And spoke the women to Naomi, [saying, "Blessed] be YHWH [because He has come through]:
[He has not] [deprived you]—[he has not left you without] [a close relative] (*go'el*) [this day]. Proclaimed be His name in Israel.
15 [The child shall be] for you a restorer of life, [to support you] [in your old age].
Indeed [your daughter-in-law] [who loves you] [has borne him]: [she who] [means more] to you [than even] [seven sons]."
16 [She took the child]—[Naomi took the baby] [and set it] [on her lap], [and took care of him], [becoming his nurse].
17 [They gave him a name]: the women of the neighborhood [gave a name], [when they said this]: "[Born is a son] to Naomi."
[They gave him] the name *Obed* (*"servant"*). He was the father of Jesse, father of David.
18 Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez begot Hezron.
19-20 And Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Aminadab. 20 Aminidab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmah.
21-22 Salmah begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed. 22 And Obed begot Jesse, [end melody] [and finally, Jesse] was the father of David.

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some "poetic licence", and some willingness on the part of the listener to be "carried" by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these "transtropilations" are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a "window" into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. "cut a covenant") to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 "beam above the door" rather than "lintel") to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between "literalness" and "listenable-ness". A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana "lean toward" the words they "conjoin" to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola "lean away" from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

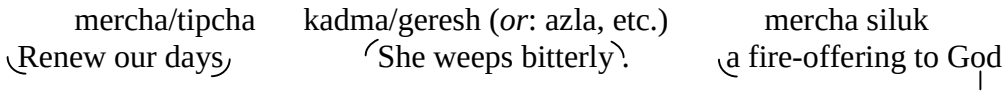
The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* "rivi'i" melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the "grey bracket" device, I indicate pairs of tropes by "wrapping them around" the phrase which have the combined melody:



Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don't strictly match the Hebrew. I also "pad" some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the leyner's cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g'dola* (֠), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the muscial phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

"*Metigah-zakef*"is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in "Navigating the Bible II") this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in "take care" in this example). Haschel's system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don't write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the leyner can choose to pronounce it as "*God*" or "*Adonai*".

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, 'The Living Torah' (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, 'The Bible With Sources Revealed' (2003)
Everett Fox, 'The Five Books of Moses' (1997)
The Stone Edition 'Tanach' (1996)
JPS 'Hebrew-English Tanach', (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, 'Notes on the New Translation of the Torah' (1969)
Robert Alter, 'The Five Books of Moses' (2004)
Commentaries in the 'Anchor Bible' series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)